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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

25 June 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Melvin R. Laird
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT : The Vietnam Study ("United States -- Vietnam
Relations 1945-1967")

1. I am writing to review where we stand with respect to the 46 volume Vietnam Study that has been leaked (at least in part) to various newspapers around the country. From his conversation with you on Monday, 21 June, Mr. Carver got the impression that you were perhaps under the misapprehension that the Agency or certain Agency officers were engaged in a systematic review of the whole study, screening it for material which would compromise intelligence sources and methods if it were put in the public domain. As Mr. Carver informed Admiral Murphy on 22 June, this is not the case. Our Deputy Director for Support [REDACTED] Mr. Coffey did assist on Saturday, 19 June, and through most of Sunday, 20 June, in a discussion and review of the situation created by the leak of the Vietnam Study that was chaired by Mr. Buzhardt and conducted in his office in the Pentagon.

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2. At the time of Mr. Carver's 22 June conversation with Admiral Murphy, no Agency officer -- other than Mr. Coffey -- had ever seen the Vietnam Study or any portions thereof. We did not have a copy in the Agency, nor were we engaged in -- or able to engage in -- any review of its contents. As Mr. Carver told Admiral Murphy, we stood ready to help out in any way we could, but without access to the documents there was little we could do.

3. On Thursday morning, 24 June, Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green called [REDACTED] Chief of our Far East Division) to request the assistance of knowledgeable Agency officers in a quick screening of the 46 volumes in order to meet a Friday, 25 June,

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deadline for the U.S. Government's response imposed by the New York court. In compliance with Mr. Green's request, we dispatched a team of nine experienced officers, all thoroughly versed in Vietnamese affairs, to assist the State Department in its screening process.

4. Also on Thursday, 24 June, Mr. Carver had a lengthy session with Mr. Buzhardt and made a personal inspection of the copy of the study in Mr. Buzhardt's office.

5. We will of course do everything we can to assist you, the Department of State, or any other U.S. Government component in this matter. Our officers' quick examination of the whole study today, however, has convinced us that to do a proper job of review we will have to have sustained access to the study for at least several days and preferably here in the Agency, where all of our other records and background materials are readily available -- including the full texts of the many Agency documents cited throughout the study. I recognize the difficulties you have in meeting needs or requests for copies of the full study, but I still need to ask that we be given at least the loan of a full set so that we can do the kind of proper, professionally thorough job of review that we need to do in order to provide you, the White House and other concerned Government components our best support.

R. E. Cushman, Jr.

Lieutenant General, USMC

Acting ~~Deputy~~ Director of Central Intelligence

O/DCI/SAVA:GACarver, Jr. /^{jal}~~low~~ (25Jun71)

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26 JUNE 71

Tell CIA pullout advice to Nixon

By Morton Kondracke
and Thomas B. Ross

Sun-Times Bureau

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WASHINGTON — The Nixon administration was advised by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1969 that it could immediately withdraw from Vietnam and "all of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is at least for another generation."

Government documents revealed Friday that the CIA offered the following prediction

of what would happen if President Nixon, at the start of his administration, had pulled all U.S. troops out of Vietnam and opened the way to a possible Viet Cong take-over of the Saigon government:

"We would lose Laos immediately. Sihanouk would preserve Cambodia by a straddling effort. All of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is at least for another generation."

"Thailand, in particular, would continue to maintain close relations with the U.S. and would seek additional support. Simultaneously, Thailand would make overtures and move toward China and the Soviet Union. It would simply take aid from both sides to preserve its independence."

"North Vietnam would consume itself in Laos and South Vietnam. Only Laos would definitely follow into the Communist orbit."

In totally rejecting the so-called domino theory on which U.S. policy was based in the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the CIA took a position consistent with a long line of estimates dating back to the original U.S. involvement in 1954.

For example, the document shows that on May 24, 1954, the CIA declared in a National Intelligence Estimate that the United States would "retain considerable leverage in South-

east Asia even if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control."

The CIA produced the estimate as part of its pessimistic assessment of the value of launching a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. It argued that air attacks were unlikely to break Hanoi's will and carried the danger of escalating the war into a direct confrontation with Communist China and the Soviet Union.

"Retaliatory measures which the North might take in Laos and South Vietnam," the CIA declared, "might make it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to regard its objectives as attainable by limited means. Thus, difficulties of comprehension might increase on both sides as scale of action mounted."

Former President Lyndon B. Johnson rejected the CIA's advice and started sustained bombing in February, 1965.

Similarly, President Nixon disregarded the

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CIA's advice to Nixon told

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CIA estimate in 1969 and decided on a slow withdrawal, an expansion of the war into Cambodia and Laos and a partial revival of the bombing of North Vietnam.

On several occasions since coming to office, Mr. Nixon has referred to immediate, total U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia as "precipitate" and the equivalent of "our defeat and humiliation."

In various ways, he has signaled an intention to preserve non-Communist governments in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Instead of pulling out of Vietnam rapidly, Mr. Nixon has withdrawn gradually, to give the South Vietnamese a "reasonable chance" to maintain their present government.

U.S. troop levels were at 540,000 when Mr. Nixon took office. They are scheduled to be down to 184,000 by Dec. 1, close to the end of Mr. Nixon's third year in office. The President has not said when — if ever — U.S. forces will be completely gone from Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon stoutly denied that the invasions of Cambodia in 1969 and Laos in 1970 constituted expansions of the war or were even related to political conditions in those countries.

In 1969, U.S. troops joined South Vietnamese forces in the invasion, while the Laos incursion was conducted by Vietnamese ground forces supported by U.S. planes and helicopters.

Mr. Nixon defended both actions as efforts to speed the "end of the war" in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the administration has exhibited interest in preserving the non-Communist character of the governments of Laos and Cambodia.

There has been a massive infusion of military and economic aid to the anti-Communist regime of Lon Nol in Cambodia, and U.S. air power continues to support South Vietnamese and Cambodian army combat operations there.

The Cambodian operations began on the

heels of Lon Nol's overthrow of Sihanouk, the man the CIA predicted would retain power if the United States left Southeast Asia. The United States did not leave, and Sihanouk fell. In some quarters, his overthrow has been ascribed to the CIA.

In Laos, the United States has continued extensive bombing raids both along the Ho Chi Minh infiltration routes in the southern part of the country and in north Laos near the Plain of Jars.

The north Laos operations — bombing and aid to anti-Communist guerillas — are linked to retention of a neutralist government in Vientiane, the capital.

The government documents, disclosed to The Sun-Times by a number of reliable sources, show the CIA consistently reported that the bombing of North Vietnam was not effective, either in military or political terms.

The CIA's estimates, the documents also reveal, provided the basis for former Defense Sec. Clark Clifford's silent campaign to get the bombing stopped in 1968.

The CIA's Office of National Estimates advanced the case against the bombing in 1965 despite CIA Director John A. McCone's advice that U.S. planes "hit them harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage."

In an April 2, 1965, memo to Sec. of State Dean Rusk, White House adviser McGeorge Bundy and Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, McCone argued that Mr. Johnson's decision the previous day to commit U.S. troops to combat would: work only "if our air strikes against the north are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the North Vietnamese."

He warned that a slow escalation of the bombing would open the U.S. government to "increasing pressure" from the press and public opinion to stop the raids.

Then, McCone concluded: "We will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves."

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AVAILABLE*

By Merion Kandracko
and Thomas R. Ross

Sun-Times Bureau

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WASHINGTON — The late President John D. Eisenhower secretly established in a national policy to eliminate Communist rule in Hanoi and reunite North and South Vietnam under a pro-U.S. government, officials revealed Thursday.

A National Security Council paper, NSC dated April 2, 1955, Eisenhower directed government to "work toward the weakening of the Communists of North and South Vietnam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anti-Communist leadership."

Eisenhower took the decision, the docu-

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CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, Fri., June 25, 1971

ke's plan for uniting both Viets told

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nts show, at the high point of his confidence in Ngo Dinh Diem's ability to emerge as a truly national, anti-Communist leader.

Diem, who has been installed as prime minister by the United States in 1954, impressed Eisenhower and Sec. of State John Foster Dulles with his unexpected efficiency in putting down a number of dissident sects in 1955. Just before the crackdown, Gen. J. Lawton James, Eisenhower's envoy in Saigon, recommended that Diem be removed. Dulles concurred and the State Department sent a cable to the U.S. Embassy directing that Diem be moved upstairs into the presidency, then a ceremonial position.

Impressed at Diem's forceful performance against the sects, Washington revoked the order and ordered it burned.

Eisenhower and Dulles were also encouraged by the seemingly mild reaction to Diem's decision to cancel the 1956 national elections, which had been agreed upon in the Geneva (Switzerland) accords.

Red Victory at polls seen

Eisenhower acquiesced in Diem's move on the basis of a Central Intelligence Agency assessment that the Saigon government "almost certainly would not be able to defeat the Communists in countrywide elections."

The documents indicate a growing sense of alienation between 1955 and 1954 in Diem's ability as a leader of both halves of Vietnam.

But just as NSC 165/1 was being promulgated, the Viet Cong launched their insurgency. And although the paper remained national policy, the documents indicate the Eisenhower administration was subsequently forced to concentrate on salvaging Diem's regime.

The documents, disclosed to The Sun-Times by a number of reliable sources, also revealed those previously unpublished facts about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam:

• All contingency planning for the bombing of North Vietnam was completed by mid-1954, but the White House passed the order to mark time "during the next six months," that is, until December, the month of the Presidential election.

• Former President Lyndon B. Johnson advised by a top-level panel in early 1961 that bombing North Vietnam would not win the war. Soon after the bombing began it was ended, but it was not working and this was proved by an exhaustive study in 1967, a year before it was stopped in November,

"possible increased activity" in secret raids on North Vietnam.

(4) From the beginning of the direct U.S. military involvement, high-ranking officials had difficulty estimating how many civilians were included in casualty figures. White House adviser Michael Forrestal observed after a visit to Vietnam in 1963: "No one really knows how many of the 20,000 'Viet Cong' killed last year were only innocent, or at least persuadable, villagers."

(5) William Jordan, a key Vietnam specialist, was sent to South Vietnam in 1963 to draw up evidence to support the administration's contention of massive infiltration by North Vietnam. He reported back: "We are unable to document and develop any hard evidence of infiltration."

(7) Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor was the principal exponent of the domino theory inside the Johnson administration. As chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Taylor warned on Jan. 22, 1964, that the fall of South Vietnam would result in the immediate loss of Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. He also warned that there could be a dangerous reaction in Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines and possibly similar "unfavorable effects" in Africa and in Latin America.

The CIA, on the other hand, consistently argued that it was unlikely that any other country would go Communist.

CIA estimate disregarded

The documents show that the CIA was largely disregarded by the policy-makers from the start of the U.S. involvement. The thrust of the CIA's estimates in the early years was that Ho represented an almost irresistible nationalist force and Diem showed no promise of establishing a solid non-Communist government.

In a National Intelligence Estimate of August, 1954, the CIA said it did "not believe

there will be the dramatic transformation in French policy necessary to win the active loyalty and support of the local population for a South Vietnam government."

"Although it is possible that the French and the Vietnamese, even with support from the U.S. and other powers, may be able to establish a strong regime in South Vietnam, we believe that the chances for this development are poor and, moreover, that the situation is more likely to continue to deteriorate progressively over the next year."

Find high regard for Ho

The CIA concluded in another document at the time that "the most significant particular political sentiment of the bulk of the population was an antipathy for the French combined with a personal regard for Ho Chi Minh as the symbol of Vietnamese nationalism."

The CIA predicted that the Communists would remain in a state of "relative quiescence" if Diem held the 1956 national elections as required by the 1954 Geneva accords that ended the war with the French. In effect, the CIA argued that Diem provoked the Communist uprising by reneging on the elections.

The documents show that Eisenhower was warned in advance by the CIA that Diem would balk at the elections but did nothing to see that they were held.

Branded a dictatorship

Eisenhower and Sec. of State John Foster Dulles decided to commit the United States to the regime, despite a 1957 estimate by the CIA that:

"A facade of representative government is maintained, but the government is in fact essentially authoritarian. The legislative powers of the National Assembly are strictly circumscribed; the judiciary is undeveloped and subordinate to the executive; and the members of the executive branch are little more than the personal agents of Diem."

"No organized opposition, legal or otherwise,

is tolerated, and critics of the regime are often repressed. . . . The exercise of power and responsibility is confined to Diem and a very small circle mainly composed of his relatives."